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A YANKEE AT THE KAISER'S COURT

BY CLARENCE H. GAINES

During the four years preceding the breaking-off of diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany our country was represented at the court of the Kaiser by a typical American, shrewd, straightforward, not easy to bluff, possessing the tact, firmness and humor that we like to think of as national characteristics. The man who was able to get on in the friendliest way with all the German officials with whom he dealt, who combined businesslike efficiency with perfect dignity and courtesy of behavior, and who was also capable of saying to an emissary of the Imperial Government that he would "stay here until Hell freezes over" before he would sign a certain document, has certainly endeared himself to the hearts of the American people.

A good deal of what Ambassador Gerard tells us in his book, *My Four Years in Germany*, could doubtless be collected by a diligent reader from other sources. This is not true of some of the most interesting observations in the volume, and it is also not true, of course, as regards the achievements of Ambassador Gerard himself. But since it is obvious that the author does not consider the chief value of his work to lie in the accounts he modestly gives of his work in looking after prisoners of war or in getting Americans out of Germany; since the story he tells of his efforts to protect American oil interests in Germany has for its point not the efficiency of Gerard but the intense surprise of the Germans that the United States should be willing to do anything at all for the Standard Oil Company!—since, in brief, the book is best considered rather as a message to the American People than as a report—it is right to

give prominence to the author's conclusions rather than to his acts. What Gerard tells us is authoritative; it is fact, or theory verified by observation and confirmed by the diplomat's sixth sense. What is more, the frame of mind evidenced throughout the treatise is exactly that sane and safe—but not too safe—temper that every one of us would like to make his own. Each chapter of the book is a lesson in good sense, worldly-wise idealism, spirited patriotism. And continually a clear note of warning is sounded.

In attempting to explain the psychology of the German people, it has been customary to lay much stress upon the false philosophy and the non-Christian ethics which that people has been taught to believe in as gospel truth. This is an easy and interesting explanation of German behavior, acceptable because it suggests the possibility of a prompt recovery on the part of the German people from their madness. But the cause referred to, though real, is of course inadequate. For the ultimate cause we must look deeper.

Among the more popular writers, Gerard is perhaps the first to estimate fully and correctly the effect upon German minds and nerves of a past hideous with war and the privations that war occasions. And in doing this he has emphasized a truth that we should take to heart, for what we need to cultivate in ourselves is not a pharisaical sense of superiority in our knowledge of the truth, but a grim realization of the weight of German imponderables.

The effect produced upon the German people by ingrained, hereditary fear, and by the experience of success and immunity resulting from submission to a military caste, has been reinforced by the most elaborate and effective system for the control of public opinion that the world has ever known; and this system has included the deliberate inculcation of national egoism and military brutality. We may now realize that the German "circle system" of voting was not only an injustice to the German people (who were, however, contented) but a potential menace to humanity. We may now understand that German ruffianism was not merely a by-product of German militarism, but in the eyes of the Government a virtue necessary for the future rulers of the world. "I think," writes Gerard, "there must have been a period quite recently when the German Government tried to imbue the people with a greater degree of frightfulness, because all of us in visiting camps, etc., observed that the

landsturm men or older soldiers were much more merciful than the younger ones."

That the members of the military caste possess Spartan virtues, narrow but incorruptible minds, great personal bravery, and true loyalty, the author more than once compels us to see. In the interests of both sanity and prudence it is well that we should see it; for to underrate the virtues of the enemy is both unsafe and unwholesome. Good qualities in the service of evil ends, though they are not pleasant or reassuring to contemplate, are far better to look upon than depravity; and the behavior of von Jagow, who after his fall took charge of a hospital at Libau, helps to lift the cloud of moral poison-gas which the war has generated.

Others have described the German system with some fulness, but none has given so compact and memorable an account of it as has Gerard, and none has so convincingly combined well-weighed opinion with first-hand observation. German government, the *Rat* system, by which social distinctions are intensified and perpetuated, the effect of numberless officials upon private and public life, the control of the Government over schools and newspapers, the skilful enslavement of the working people, the tying up of land for unlimited periods—all these methods of autocracy are explained by the author, and their actual workings are shown by striking examples. "There is a real system of caste in Germany," writes Gerard. "For instance, I was playing tennis one day with a man, and while dressing afterwards I asked him what he was. He answered that he was a *Kaufmann* or merchant. For the German this answer was enough. It placed him in the merchant class. I asked him what sort of *Kaufmann* he was. He then told me he was president of a large electrical company." This is but one of many revealing anecdotes.

Von Buelow told us all plainly enough that the Socialists could never amount to anything in Germany as a political party; and events since the publication of his book, *Imperial Germany*, have shown the correctness of his view. Yet Americans are still prone to fix their hopes in some measure upon the Social-Democrats. Those who expect these radicals to bring about a revolution in advance of the utter defeat of the German armies should first lay to heart Gerard's deliberately expressed statement that Germany will never make peace because of revolution, and secondly

should duly estimate the force of the following anecdote: "After a successful French attack in the Champagne, I heard it said of a German woman, whose husband was thought to be killed, that her rage and despair had been so great that she had said she would become a Social-Democrat; and her expression was repeated as showing to what lengths grief had driven her." The unfortunate fact is that "men of reasonable and liberal views, who do not wish to declare themselves against both religion and morality," can scarcely find in Germany a political refuge; and it seems obvious that the Socialists are unfitted by their nature and their position to exert real influence.

Reason and liberalism, however, are not dead in Germany; they are merely in abeyance. Von Bethmann-Hollweg is, in Gerard's opinion, "liberal at heart," and Helfferich, as judged by the same shrewd observer, is opposed to militarism. More significant, however, than the accessibility of certain prominent men to advanced ideas is the changing attitude of the whole people as revealed in the Zabern Affair of 1913-1914. What was obvious in this affair was the ultimate triumph of militarism; what was studiously concealed was the alarm felt by the Imperial Government lest the German people were getting ready to demilitarize themselves. It was this alarm, our former ambassador fully believes, which determined the Emperor and the ruling classes for war. There is thus a possibility of the formation in Germany of a great liberal party—a party with which the Entente Allies could safely make peace;—and the political alliance of all liberal and reasonable men would become comparatively easy if the Centrum should cease to be a purely Catholic party. But the wished-for consummation is hardly to be expected until the German soldiers have returned defeated from their trenches.

How soon that will be, no one now knows. What is certain is that in Germany the influence of the military dominates, and will dominate until the victory we all hope for and believe in arrives. Some of the most interesting passages in Gerard's book point to the weakness of the Foreign Office and the Chancellor, or to the immense power wielded by Ludendorff and his like. Gerard's notes to the Foreign Office requesting the German Government to agree to some definite plan for the inspection of prisoners were sent by the recipients to the military authorities, who did

not answer them. Our ambassador found that he never came in contact with the persons who really passed upon the notes, and in order to secure consideration of his plans, he was obliged to say to the Chancellor, "If I cannot get an answer to my proposition about prisoners, I will take a chair and sit in front of your palace on the street until I receive an answer." On the whole one may gather that the civil authorities would have preferred to be rather more decent than the military permitted them to be.

As to the attitude of militarized Germany toward democratic America, we at present have no illusions; but this was not always the case, and, as Demosthenes told the Athenians, it is never profitless to review our past for the purpose of correcting our mistakes.

In the past, then, we failed to understand "the underlying hatred of an autocracy for a successful democracy" or the envy which the wealth, liberty, and commercial success of America aroused in German hearts, or the deep and strong resentment of the German Government and people against the Monroe Doctrine.

That Germany was incapable of comprehending the mind of America we were at first somewhat slow to learn. We know it now; but there is still a revelation in store for those simple-minded persons who do not perceive that any acute and well-informed German must have seen that President Wilson would not and could not declare war, and that the Lusitania note was a mere sop to public opinion. Germans did not simply doubt that the United States would adopt universal military service; they knew that it would not, and said so!

That the men in control of the German Government thought America extremely gullible, the whole course of their negotiations with our Government shows. Additional proof may be found in the constant suggestions made to Gerard regarding alleged danger to America from Japan, in various mysterious negotiations through which it was sought to entangle or put off the American Ambassador, in the extraordinary demand made upon Gerard to sign what was practically a treaty after the severance of diplomatic relations, in the Kaiser's telegram to President Wilson, which was not immediately given to the American press for a reason that throws a curious side-light on the contents of that historic communication. Nevertheless, it is clear that there were in Germany men who wanted peace with

America and who favored a straightforward policy in dealing with her.

Gerard has effectively portrayed the enemy that we are now fighting. He has done this in the course of an unpretentious and not too lengthy narrative, but he has done it with quite sufficient thoroughness. He has described the German "system" with great clearness and sobriety—not omitting to point out the danger that American commerce must face after the war in Germany's plan of socialized buying and selling, or to suggest the unpopular inference that some modification of our methods of dealing with the "trusts" may be required. He has written impartially, disagreeing, for example, with the popular estimate of the Crown Prince, and conveying the impression that by no means all Germans are discourteous, heartless or inaccessible to reason. His book is pitched in the right key to reach American ears. It expresses, moreover, that undismayed, undeceived, and soberly resolute spirit that is the spirit of America. There has been need of a book about Germany for Americans, written by an American with fullest knowledge and adequate responsibility—a book that would be read not merely by the student of history but by the merchant, the farmer, the housewife, as well. Such a book Gerard has written. One does not know of any other person in America today who could have done the like.

CLARENCE H. GAINES.